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MANIFESTO OF THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC RURAL MOVEMENT

Chapter I.

CATHOLIC ACTION AND THE FARMER.

"COME, follow Me, and I shall make you fishers of men," said Christ to Peter, Andrew, James and John, the fishermen, as they plied their trade on the lake of Galilee. "Go you also into My vineyard," He told the country labourers who stood in the market yard idle. "Behold the fields white for the harvest," He told the farmers, and bade them pray the Lord of the harvest that He should send labourers into the harvest. At His word the first band of apostles gathered around Him—Peter from his boats and fishing nets, Matthew from his counting desk, Nathaniel from his fig-trees and orchards, Luke from his surgery, others from the lake, others from their farms and market gardens—for greater issues were at stake: Christ was about to launch His campaign for the conquest of the world.

When, at the summons of Catholic Action, the laity are called upon to participate in the apostolate of the Hierarchy, they are asked to answer the same call as the first apostles. "To participate in the apostolate of the Hierarchy" is to do the

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work which the apostles did, and which the Bishops and priests who succeeded them have been doing ever since: fighting for Christ, winning souls for God, striving for the establishment of Christian principles, and the reign of Christ's love. Priests and Bishops, as specially ordained apostles, do their work in the church, in the parish, wherever duty calls. The laity, as unordained apostles, do the self-same work on their farms, in their homes, in their districts and country organisations, among the friends and neighbours, changing their outlook, making them more Christian, bringing them closer to God. War is not won by officers alone, but by the successful co-operation of both officers and their men. The ultimate triumph of Christ demands a similar spirit of co-operation. The work is vast: the conquest of the whole world. But it is not confined to the Hierarchy alone. Christ's command is explicit: "Go you ALSO into my vineyard."

The Inside Story.

Catholic Action is, then, an apostolate, the official enlistment of the laity into a vast crusade for the conquest of the world. The task seems colossal, but Christ does not command the impossible. Let us see, then, what is to be done.

It is man who makes society. If society to-day is pagan, it is because the men who make society are pagan. Therefore, if you would rechristianise society, you begin with the simple formula of making men Christian. External legislation and social reform count for little if, at heart, man still remains corrupt. They only drive the evil in, whereas true reform is not some-

thing superimposed from without, but something which grows from within outwards. How did the Church deal with the problem of slavery, which was destroying society in the days of the Roman Empire? By abolishing slavery by law? No, but by insisting on charity. "Remember," she told the master, "these slaves are your brothers in Christ, they are your neighbour, whom you are bound to love as Christ loves you," and under the influence of Christian charity their chains were not dragged off, but fell off of their own accord. Or, how, again, did she attack the problem of over-centralisation and its train of evils? By driving men from cities by angels with flaming swords? or by calling down upon them fire and brimstone from heaven? No, but by attracting men to the country by the great monasteries with which she studded Europe, which became new centres of rural life and Christian teaching, the God-given means of diffusing Christianity among the barbarian invaders from whose rude strength she fashioned the great people of the Middle Ages. As we have learnt in modern times, you will not make society sober by prohibition and dry canteens, but by making men sober. You make society pure by making men and women pure, and if you want to make society Christian you begin by making men and women Christian.

Specialisation.

Man is also a social being. He lives among men, and for better or worse his life has some influence on the lives of those around him. Therefore, the second point insisted upon by Catholic Action is that the reform of the individual implies a

REFORM OF THE INDIVIDUAL AS A MEMBER OF SOCIETY. Men of all ranks and callings have abandoned Christ, and in order to win them back Catholic Action recruits, from their ranks, select bands of militant Catholics, who follow the same profession, plough in the same fields, work in the same sheds, Catholics who know their fellow workers, who know their problems, who are liked and trusted by them, and who can, therefore, influence them and gradually win them over. All are called to be apostles, but each in his own sphere. Workmen are to be the apostles of workmen, farmers of farmers, shearers of shearers. That is what is meant when Catholic Action is said to be a SPECIALISED apostolate. Each apostle, the farmer, the labourer, the teacher, the factory worker, the woman in the local baby health centre, begins the conquest of the world by the conquest of the little world about him or her.

Normal Christian Life.

Catholic Action is not only a question of making men Christian, but of **keeping** them Christian. It is not enough to gather sheep together and treat them for footrot and then draft them back to the damp, unhealthy paddocks where they contracted the disease. You must first drain the land. So, too, it is not enough to make Christians of the men and women around you. You must go farther, and make the whole environment—the habits, manners, circumstances, all the factors which shape their lives—so Christian that it will be no longer next to impossible for them to live a normal Christian life. It is hard to live a Christian life under slum conditions, whether the slums are in the heart of the

city or in the heart of the bush. If you do not give a living wage to the man you employ it will be difficult for him to be honest and live as a decent Christian. How can a small farmer who is being ground down by trading banks, agents, big business concerns, and undue governmental interference, marry and rear a family, and live up to his calling as a Christian father? The only chance of survival is for the whole family to slave from daylight to dark, to live in a hovel, with very little opportunities for the home life and training so necessary for the upbringing of a Catholic family.

To Christianise men, without making it possible for them to live up to their dignity as Christians, reminds one of the parable told by Our Lord: "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man he walketh through places without water, seeking rest; and not finding it, he says: I will return into my house whence I came out. And when he is come he findeth it swept and garnished. Then he goeth and, taking seven other spirits more wicked than himself, entering in they dwell there. And the last state of that man becomes worse than the first."

Catholic Action must recognise this and supply a lasting remedy; and, indeed, it is one of the characteristics of Catholic Action which distinguishes it from so many other movements within the Church that its whole approach to modern problems is what might be termed the approach of **POSITIVE RECONSTRUCTION**. Some societies aim solely at the perfection of the individual; others go beyond the needs of their own members to succour the poor, without making any effort to change the

conditions which lead to poverty. Others aim at withdrawing their members from the evil influences around them and, in the secluded atmosphere of a Catholic environment, endeavour to strengthen them against the evil they must subsequently meet. These methods are somewhat like the process employed by farmers in "pickling" their seed against smut and contagion. If the "pickling" is done well and conditions are not too severe, the seed will grow. But all these works, good as they are in themselves, are mostly negative; they represent the Church on the defensive, or engaged in a desperate effort to save as many as possible from the wreck which threatens modern society. Catholic Action is far more positive. It not only saves, but strengthens; it not only "pickles," but it attacks the smut which would otherwise destroy the seed.

Drift to the City.

There is abundant scope for this positive work of Catholic Action, especially in the problems connected with the breakdown of country family life and the depopulation of the countryside, which, from the viewpoint of the Church, is nothing short of tragedy. Drifting to the city means drifting from Catholic homes to dangers which face youth at every turn. From the skilled and steady work of the farmland, they drift into the ranks of unskilled labourers, who depend on casual work, and must, consequently, live through the numbing days of unemployment and poverty. When they do find permanent employment, they must sacrifice the healthy life of the open fields for the poisonous atmosphere of city workshops. Often, drifting from the

country means drifting from God, going the way of the Prodigal Son into the distant city, where he spends his substance living riotously. There are many causes responsible for this exodus, and the remedies to be applied must be suggested by the causes which are the root of the trouble. Where they are spiritual, spiritual remedies must be applied; where they are economic or cultural, economic and cultural remedies must come to the fore. Where the exodus is due merely to lack of openings, new openings and fresh opportunities must be created. Where it is due merely to the glamour of city life, the lure of high but insecure wages the craving for creature comforts and the material things of life, there must be a change of heart. Not only must Catholic Action stem the drift, but it must build up rural life anew, make the country more attractive than the town, win men back to the land, and restore to farmers their sense of dignity as sons of the soil and sons of God.

There are tremendous difficulties to be overcome. The work is not of a day, perhaps not of a generation. Protagonists of commercialised, large-holding farming seem to think the difficulties are insuperable. But they regard farming merely as a source of investment and not as a way of life and a way to heaven. They measure land in terms of pounds, shillings and pence, and not in God-given acres flowing with milk and honey for human consumption. The salvation of Australian rural life will probably not lie in the way of big capitalised farming, or even in what we are familiar with in schemes of closer settlement. A possible solution may be

the establishment of small, self-subsisting farming communities where life is made happy, free, and prosperous under the kindly reign of Christian charity, common sense, and the will and the way to work.

Farmers' Conditions.

The solution for similar agricultural problems in other countries has been found in the application of Christian principles to country life, and where they have been successfully applied they have been applied by Catholic bodies and organisations pledged to help the man on the land. The work of transforming society is too vast for any isolated individual effort, hence, Catholic Action must be not only an official and specialised apostolate, but an organised apostolate, and that is why groups of Catholic farmers from all parts of Australia came together and formed themselves into members of a National Catholic Rural Movement, which aims at applying the principles of Catholic Action to Australian rural life. As members of this movement, they are no longer alone. They are not only united with the members of the local country groups, or even with all the groups which were represented at the first historic conference of farmers held at Xavier College in February, 1940. They now belong to a world-wide organisation of Catholic laymen, who are farmers, who sought for and found solutions for their problems in Catholic principles, and who, with all the courage which comes from conviction, prayer, and the grace of God, have gone forward fearlessly to bring the world of agriculture to the feet of Christ the Nazarene. Extraordinary success has met their efforts in Holland,

Belgium, Canada, U.S.A., and other places. There is no need to follow their methods in slavish imitation. Their problems are not exactly identical with ours; what suits them may not suit us. The beauty of Catholic Action is that it is not all to one pattern. It can, and it must, adapt itself to local conditions, so that it may be part and parcel with the life and make-up of the people. But, at least, we can study their methods, and system and organisations. When we find Australian farmers staggering under the same overdrafts which once crippled them, and when we see young men hungering for land and the means to work it, the National Catholic Rural Movement can at least consider the possibility of establishing credit unions and farming communities, which have been so successful abroad. When we find our farmers labouring under disabilities of marketing their goods and securing elementary justice, middlemen growing rich, and farmers heading the list of insolvencies, the National Catholic Rural Movement can at least consider how far true co-operatives could give the security they give in other countries. When we see farmers losing heart, and whole families being forced from their ancestral homes to join in the drift to the city, where so many are lost, not only to the land but to God, their fellow-Catholics cannot stand by idle. The National Catholic Rural Movement has put its hand to the plough, and, please God, the result of its prayer and work and deliberations will mean the inauguration of a new era in the agricultural history of Australia, the spiritual uplift of the man on the land, the restoration of all things in Christ.

Chapter II.

THE LOSS OF ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE IN OUR RURAL COMMUNITIES.

The National Catholic Rural Movement has been brought into existence as a concrete attempt to meet a concrete problem.

The problem is not one which deals with one or two aspects of farming life. It is in the nature of a crisis, for the general paralysis which has affected Australian agriculture in its brief century of existence is one which threatens to destroy the life of the Australian rural community. A tragic story of shattered hopes, valiant but futile endeavours, slow decay and torpor, could be written.

The life or death of a nation can generally be judged accurately from the life or death of its population. A declining population signifies national decline, just as surely as a rising population indicates increased power and influence for the nation fortunate enough in these times to enjoy it.

What is true of a nation is true of its component parts. There is no way of gauging the health of agricultural society within a nation so accurately as by examining the number of people who earn their livelihood from the land. If this is so—and few arguments can be brought against it—the fate of Australian agriculture is sealed.

At the beginning of the World War in 1914 there were approximately 211,000 males engaged in agricultural pursuits in Australia. At the beginning of the present war there were not 190,000. So that in

the intervening twenty-five years more than 20,000 men—and many families—have abandoned the life on the land.

This is a running sore; and, as any medical man will tell us, a running sore, if left unremedied, in the end will cause the death of a patient. In this respect, the life and death of individuals and nations are very similar.

No remedy will be found for the rural crisis which, like a malignant cancer, afflicts the Australian body until the causes of the disease are properly analysed, and, just as certainly, the causes of the flight from the land will not be found in one thing only. As with most diseases, the causes are complex and mysterious until the threads are unravelled.

The most obvious cause of the disintegration of rural life is economic. The economic problem, which is common to most modern countries, has features which are peculiar to Australia.

The basic trouble with farming in Australia is that it has never been a "way of life" in the sense in which it has been in the Old World. It has been an industry, an exploitation of the soil for money returns. For too many Australians the aim of a life on the land has simply been to find a sure way to an eventual life in the city.

The very words "agricultural industry" reveal a frame of mind which, in the end, must be destructive of the life on the land. It is a fact, accepted by any person with any common sense, that "agriculture" and "industry" are two opposite things, two completely different ways of life. "Agriculture" is concerned fundamentally with man's primeval struggle with the soil;

"Industry," in modern times, is based on man's attempts—often unsuccessful—to make the machine his servant.

The one is a stable life, far removed from the rush, the noise, the smells of city life. The other lives in them, and can live in no other place. The one is a stable existence, regular, intelligent, varied. The other is humdrum, monotonous, and, through the repetition of the same sort of unintelligent, mechanised work, day in and day out, ultimately destructive of the human intellect. Pius XI. pointed out the tragic but very real fact that while raw materials came out of the factory ennobled and transformed, human material emerged deformed. We must not let the farm become a factory.

To put together the words, "agricultural industry," means more than the coining of a descriptive phrase. It means, in solid fact, that the industrial life of the city is being brought closer and closer to the life of the land, and is tending more and more to supplant it. It is an undeniable fact that the two ways of life cannot be merged, cannot be lived side by side. Between the rural and the urban existence there must be made a battle to the death, and, because of the false ideas of the prophets of "progress" in our society, the big battalions have decreed the death of rural life and the drums of victory beat from the mechanical fortresses of our city civilisation.

Had the founders of Australia wished to evolve a system which must inevitably destroy the nation they pioneered, they could not have done their work more effectively than the work which has been done in Australian agriculture. It is a

truism to say that Australian agriculture has existed, not for Australia, but as a granary for countries overseas. "The overseas market"—that has always been the objective of Australian farmers, and even to-day, when the entire rural world is tumbling in ruins, many a farmer thinks that all his problems would be solved if he could fight his way clear of the entanglement of marketing boards, and be allowed to bargain for himself.

There is no such easy solution. The trouble is not that the Australian farmer is prevented by marketing boards from reaching his market, but that he has to rely on overseas markets at all for his prosperity and even for his very livelihood. For, in the present-day world, it is clear that no nation, least of all Australia, can rely on overseas markets.

Because of this vicious system of dependence on foreign markets—farmers have been involved despite themselves—their noble calling has been reduced to a gamble in which the forces arrayed against them hold all the cards. The one result is as clear as daylight.

For a variety of causes, ranging from paying inflated prices for land in boom seasons, to the necessity of borrowing to tide over difficulties in slump years, the vast majority of our farmers, by means of the everlasting curse of mortgages, have fallen into the hands of financial institutions. Ownership of the farm by the farmer himself is, relatively, a rare thing in Australia. True, his name may be on the title deeds. True, in many instances, he may live a life of real comfort in comparison with the life lived by workers in the city. Nevertheless, if he wants to

carry more stock on his land, if he wants to send his children to school for an extra year, in only too many cases it is not the farmer himself who decides those things, but the local bank manager or some obscure clerk in the city office of a wool company.

It is truly unfortunate that this loss of ownership and forfeiture of real independence is often not seen in its true light. If that obscure clerk, whom the farmer himself has often never seen, were to walk into the farmer's home and say flatly, "You can't send your son to school this year," the farmer would probably strike him; and yet, because years of life under these conditions have made the farmer accustomed to making his requests to an obscure clerk, the fact that he gets a polite notice to the same effect does not seem to him an affront to his independence. Despite this, many continue to think that they own their own farms.

It is a first principle of the N.C.R.M. that all that has got to stop. Farmers once more must take their destiny into their own hands. They must once more work for their own security and for the greatness of their country—not for the interests of a few individuals whom they do not know and who do not know them. They must be free, independent, self-supporting.

To believe that the present war is going to make things any better for our rural population would be a cruel error. Wars never make things better. At the best they only stop them getting worse. We must expect policies of economic nationalism to continue. We must not expect to regain the markets we have lost. We must rely

on ourselves. If we do not, there is the grave likelihood that the fate of certain forms of specialised farming will be visited on the rest of our primary producers.

The rural community must consciously grapple with this problem if this fate is to be avoided. As an organised body, it must re-examine the basis of its own existence, and, in the light of its examination, consciously plan and build up its own future. The N.C.R.M. aims at supplying the machinery for this essential work.

Chapter III.

MODERN EDUCATION — MENACE TO THE LIFE ON THE LAND

Although so much space has been devoted to the economic aspect of the rural problem, it would be a great error to think it is the only cause of the flight from the land. Certainly it is very important, but there are others which are almost as important.

To take an example—there is the whole problem of education and its relation to the life on the land. An example of the nature of the problem can be seen from the remark made recently by a teacher in one of our schools, "X has plenty of brains and ability. It is a great pity that his father intends to take him back on the farm instead of letting him go in for a profession in the city."

Implicit in this statement is the innuendo that the farm is no place for a bright boy, and that it is only the duller members of the family, who would be hopeless at anything else, who should go back to the land. This attitude is, of course, so

thoroughly ridiculous that it should not need contradicting. Anyone who has realised the real nature of farm work knows that to run a farm efficiently and well requires far more common sense, intelligence, and initiative than much of the repetitive work of the city.

Unfortunately, this attitude is not confined to one teacher or one school. The entire Australian educational System is built up on the idea of preparing boys and girls for a life in the city.

Imagine the case of a boy going to a typical secondary school. In the vast majority of cases he studies languages, English and foreign, history, mathematics, and science. Not one of these fits him in any particular way for the life on the land. Lest there should be any misunderstanding of the point aimed at, this does not mean to imply that this broad cultural training should not be given to those who are destined to spend their lives on the land. On the contrary, it has often been proved that the inclusion of this cultural training is of as much assistance to the young farmer as it is to those engaged in city vocations, as much for the development of initiative which it encourages as for the value of the knowledge itself.

The point at issue is, thus, not the elimination of general cultural subjects in the training of a boy destined for the life on the land, but the inclusion in the curriculum of specialised training in agricultural subjects. This is a matter of the utmost importance. It is impossible to expect a boy whose education has prepared him for the life of a doctor, lawyer, or civil servant to be content with the

completely different life on the land—just as it would be impossible to expect the opposite. Education, if it is to achieve its proper function in any case, must be a preparation for real life, not an end in itself. It seems, therefore, that unless this potent cause of the flight from the land is remedied by the provision of agricultural training, the flight will continue. Unless he can see his future life on the land as a vocation—an opportunity to love and serve God—the land will remain a harsh tyrant and an enemy.

"Machinery" will be found by the N.C.R.M. for the consideration of this factor also.

Chapter IV.

THE FULL LIFE AND THE LIFE ON THE LAND

Finally, there remain to be considered the grave deficiencies of rural life from the social and cultural point of view, which cannot be ignored when we attempt to seek the reasons why people leave the land. It would not be out of place in this context to mention what is said by the "Manifesto on Rural Life"—published by the National Catholic Rural Life Conference of the United States, with the strong support of the entire American Hierarchy and with an introduction by his Lordship the Bishop of Fargo (Most Rev. Aloysius J. Muench):

"The farm family not infrequently suffers from its condition of isolation, lack of social and cultural contacts, lack of educational and religious facilities for child, youth, and adult. The world of things and daily toil tend to crowd out

the things that give meaning to life. Though it need not be so, the country is largely a place of cultural barrenness where, in making a livelihood, people have neglected the art of living. The tone of country life tends to the dull and commonplace. The farmer's mind is often closed to the advantages of scientific farming. He is content to follow traditional methods, which do not always make for progress. Isolation has developed in very many farmers an unhealthy individualism, which blinds them to the need and value of co-operative effort and deprives farming communities of the special benefits which only social living and co-operative endeavour can procure.

"In many rural areas there exists a widespread indifference to school education. Farmers as a group do not appreciate the need for suitable houses, aesthetic landscaping, equipment which eliminates drudgery, and the things which make for culture and refinement. Even where income warrants these improvements, traditional habits often restrain the farmer from making them. In the days of bountiful incomes for most farmers, only a small percentage used their income to improve living conditions.

"Taking the nation's farm population as a whole, the farm family has gravitated to a low economic and cultural level. Many farmers, however, and many communities of farmers, have not neglected the things which make for culture and economic security. Their success demonstrates the possibility of economic security and wholesome living conditions on the countryside.

"Isolation is, in a large measure, responsible for the plight of the farm

family. Education is needed to make the farm family master of its economic destiny and to open to its members new cultural and intellectual vistas. Education is needed to change the mental attitude of the farmer and the farm family. The farmer should learn to look upon his farm as a home. He should learn to appreciate the things necessary for wholesome rural family life—a modern, sanitary house, properly furnished, equipped with labour-saving devices and installations, and supplied with reading material and other things of cultural value. The extension of rural electrification should also stimulate the development of home arts and crafts—a cultural and an economic blessing as well as another tie to bind the family together. The farmyard could be made attractive with little expense, apart from the labour of the family. Landscaping, including the use of trees and flowers, would give the farm home its proper setting and make it a pleasant and satisfying place of residence.

"Schools, farm and parish organisations, co-operative agricultural extension service, governmental bulletins, libraries, and the radio offer means for educating the farmer to appreciate the need and value of better living conditions and the means whereby they can be attained. They will also help to broaden his outlook on life."

That is the situation with which the Australian farmer is faced, and these are the problems which the N.C.R.M. sets out to tackle. It is obvious that although these problems are economic, social, or educational, a solution is of tremendous importance to the Catholic Church.

Chapter V.

THE RESULT — DRIFT TO THE CITY.

There is no doubt that the Faith is strongest in those districts where the rural way of life is most firmly established. Writing the introduction to the "Manifesto on Rural Life," referred to above, his Lordship Bishop Muench, of Fargo, declared: "The Church has ever shown a special solicitude for those whose living is derived from the land. 'In the twenty centuries of her existence,' writes Archbishop Cicognani, Apostolic Delegate to the United States, 'the Catholic Church has ever shown, emphasised even, her predilection for those who till the soil, on whose work and efforts depends so large a part of the well-being of all.' One need not search far or deeply for the reason behind this solicitude for the tiller of the land. The occupation of agriculture offers the most favourable conditions, generally speaking, for the development of private property, the fostering of home life, the culture of initiative, prudence, thrift, courage, and other priceless virtues, and for the promotion of simple but wholesome and rugged living."

Australian farmers have reason to be grateful to their own Bishops, who have always been strong in their defence of rural life as the real basis of a settled civilisation. The Catholic Agricultural Colleges of Abergowrie (Q'ld.), Woodlawn (N.S.W.), and Tardun (W.A.), are not only a tangible sign of what is being done by the Church to stimulate a rural revival in Australia, but are themselves a tribute to the foresight of the Bishops who founded them, and a pledge that their memories will be kept evergreen in the

minds and hearts of the Catholic rural communities of Australia.

Despite these efforts, however, the drift has continued.

The great reasons for the tragic flight from the land, to sum up, are as follow:

- (a) The lack of a secure financial basis for agricultural production.
- (b) The lack of local industries.
- (c) The lack of adequate facilities for secondary education.
- (d) The lack of social and community life.
- (e) The lack of comforts in the rural home.

More than one parish priest whose work is carried on in a country parish has testified to the deep sense of anxiety which he has felt as he has seen Catholics, in particular, leave the land. Very many of the country districts which in the past have been almost entirely Catholic have ceased to be so.

The Rural Movement is a movement of country Catholics. Nevertheless even in the vital question of land settlement, its policy of extending its practical services equally to everybody irrespective of religious allegiance will hold good. One of the Services established by the Movement is the notification of farms which have become vacant or are likely to become vacant in any particular district. Then any suitable settlers who wishes to go on the land will be notified, so that he will have the advantages which the existence of a N.C.R.M. Group in the district can give.

These advantages include an impartial valuation of the farm in question so that the settler will not pay above a fair value through ignorance of local conditions.

Another advantage is a kind of "big brother" policy by the Group which will ensure that the new settler will have a friendly spirit around him when he enters and will not have to battle to make friends in an unfamiliar area.

Chapter VI.

THE SOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM.

This, however, is only one small unit among the objectives which the N.C.R.M. sets itself. The particular problems which have been mentioned are only a few of the problems which the rural population will have to face. What is necessary to meet these problems, which will continue to exist as time goes on, is not so much a machinery to solve one of them, but rather a MOVEMENT which will have the organisation and the ideas to meet ALL the problems of the farmers as they crop up.

There are only two alternatives left after we have made an analysis of the problems confronting the rural population—whether we are going to do nothing about them, leave them as they are, allow the rural population to decline into ruin, or take up the challenge and try to do something about these problems, no matter how small our initial efforts may be, no matter how much we have to take on faith from individuals who are doing this work for the first time.

The former alternative promises nothing—only that the present process of rural disintegration will go on. The other alternative may fail—but actually it is succeeding; and, given the enthusiastic support of all interested parties, there is no reason why it should not succeed, as the character and ability behind the Movement would then be invincible.

After all, we are doing no more than has already been done effectively in other countries. Although the example of other countries may be scoffed at in some quarters, nevertheless, there is the unanswerable fact that in Belgium, Canada, Denmark, and other countries, where farmers have organised along the lines proposed here, they have in large part succeeded in solving the problems with which they were faced.

Admittedly, there are differences. Admittedly, in Australia, we Catholics are only one in five in the population. Admittedly, the whole of Australia covers a vast area, more vast than the majority of those countries combined. Nevertheless, given enthusiasm, spiritual fervour, and constancy, these are only matters of detail and organisation which can be overcome by the wise exercise of human ingenuity.

The troubles from which the farmers suffer are those of the entire modern world. The young worker, the young student, the business man, are all caught in the grip of a pagan, material society, which, because of its denial of God—brings down war, depressions and class war.

Because Governments are irreligious and inefficient, we cannot rely on them to save us. Nor can we leave all to the Bishops and priests—overburdened with a thousand cares and far too few in number. That is why the recent Popes have given the call to Catholic Action. They ask us to set up great Catholic organisations, directed and led by laymen, which alone can help us to save ourselves.

So we have an obligation to act as apostles of Christ—commissioned by Him to reconstruct a new world on the lines He shows us. We have to improve ourselves, our own personalities, our own

knowledge of the Faith, our knowledge of the problems of our rural communities.

Armed thus, we have to carry this knowledge, this new spirit of confidence and vigour, to other Catholics and to the pagans who live about us. In our homes, among our friends, there is so much to do. We have to change ourselves as individuals; further, we have to change the community in which we live. This is the only way . . . By the help of God, under the guidance of our Bishops, with the assistance of our priests—by our own initiative, courage, and faith we can do it.

Chapter VII.

WHAT THE N.C.R.M. SETS OUT TO DO.

These were the considerations which impelled the representatives of rural centres who gathered together in Melbourne for the first Rural Conference to form the National Catholic Rural Movement. In fact, they had no alternative. Having come together from all parts of Victoria and the Riverina, they discovered that, no matter what district they were in, they were faced with problems which were substantially the same: problems which were at the same time spiritual, social, and economic. It was inconceivable to them that faced with the challenge, they should go back to their scattered homes and do nothing about it. Therefore, with an abundance of faith in God, they formed the N.C.R.M.

What can the National Catholic Rural Movement DO, if it is properly organised and if it gains the widespread support which its objective deserves?

It will be understood that the answer which is given here is not one which will be realised in one, two or three years. The crisis of the rural population is the fruit of over a hundred years' ignorance and mismanagement of our agricultural problems. The N.C.R.M. will not be catapulted into hasty action, no matter how desirable any particular objective may be. How soon the movement will be able to do anything practical to meet the needs of the moment will depend on its own members—on the amount of enthusiasm, constancy, and prayer which they put into their own work, and on the amount of co-operation which they are able to enlist. It is in their own hands.

However, the lesson of what our brothers have been able to achieve in other countries entitles us to expect considerable practical results from our Movement.

(1) The N.C.R.M. can give to the vast, unorganised mass of farmers the same **strength, unity and cohesion** as men in cities get by organising in companies and associations. A united rural organisation can speak in the name of the rural population with one voice, and whenever the interests of that part of the community require representation it can be secured far more powerfully and effectively through one body than through the isolated efforts of numerous individuals.

(2) By gradually evolving and developing policies aiming at common sense plans of farm settlement, it can bring economic security to farmers and farm labourers, and enable the most promising of them to become economically independent.

(3) One of the greatest activities of the Movement will be in carrying on great campaigns to reveal to the rural com-

munity the principles of true co-operation, which, from more points of view than one, can be the salvation of the farming class. Unfortunately, past attempts at co-operation in Australia have not been a uniform success, owing to a variety of causes. Chief among these causes were the facts that in the majority of cases they were not REAL co-operatives which were organised, but actually private joint-stock ventures, in which the profit of the shareholders was the prime objective. Secondly, and even more important, was the complete lack of any education in co-operation among those who participated in even those co-operative ventures which were genuine.

The experience of these overseas movements which have organised successful co-operatives, to the great benefit of the rural community, has proved that no lasting success can be hoped for unless the principles of co-operation and the running of particular co-operative enterprises are understood by those who take part in them. It is impossible to expect success in co-operation unless attempts to achieve it are accompanied by a strong movement of Adult Education, which will be the greatest single activity of the N.C.R.M.

Once this essential preliminary work has been understood and carried on, the N.C.R.M. has high expectations that co-operation can open a world of benefit to the farmer and to the rural community in general.

Consumers' co-operatives can lower the living costs of the farmer, and correspondingly allow his living standards to rise. Co-operation in selling can enable the farmers of a region to reduce the costs of marketing by eliminating middlemen's costs. Co-operative insurance in many

countries has proved its undoubted value to the farming community, which has repeatedly been a victim of the profiteering premiums of the established companies. Co-operation can do much to further a radical policy of decentralisation.

Co-operation can arrange for improved medical services in every country centre where these are needed, and where the population is possessed of sufficient interest and incentive to work for their organisation.

Last, but by no means least, among the various avenues of co-operative activity are the great institutions of credit co-operatives, which go by the name of credit unions. In other countries these have been among the greatest boons conferred by movements of the same nature on the rural community.

The objectives of Credit Unions have been stated as follows in the "Manifesto on Rural Life," to which reference has already been made:

"Since the individual farmer does not command much credit, he should strengthen whatever credit he may have by joining it with the credit of other good farmers of the community. Pooling resources in co-operative credit associations is of great advantage to the member farmers. Interest rates can be kept low, repayments can be made on reasonable terms, character can be made more favourable. Wherever developed, such credit associations have been instrumental in reducing foreclosures on farms. Moreover, they have enjoyed the confidence of governmental loaning agencies.

"The purpose of such credit associations should be to help not only the farmer

already on the farm, but also the young farmer who wishes to have a farm of his own. Properly organised, such credit associations can be the depository of the liquid assets of a farmer for bad times, and can serve as an agency for the elimination of commissions, high fees and extra charges usually incidental to loans. These are all important items, because they increase the costs of farming by a very considerable limit. The State should assist such co-operative credit associations in their beginnings through favourable legislation and adequate money advances. In doing so the State promotes public well-being, because farm ownership is rendered more secure, wealth is more equitably distributed, and a large portion of the nation's population is taught the important lesson of self-help. Healthy agrarianism is undoubtedly one of the chief assets, if not the chief asset, of a State."

(4) Among the other great objectives of the N.C.R.M. as an organisation is the protection, in the political sphere, of the rural community which it represents. The relation of the N.C.R.M. to party politics should be clearly understood from the beginning. As an organisation, the N.C.R.M. is completely outside the political sphere, AND THIS PRINCIPLE OF NON-PARTICIPATION IN PARTY POLITICS WILL ALWAYS BE MAINTAINED BY THE N.C.R.M.

This rigid abstention from the arena of party politics has reference, of course, only to the N.C.R.M. AS AN ORGANISATION, but it is a prohibition which applies also to all those who occupy a high administrative or directive position in the organisation. Other individual members of the

N.C.R.M., in their capacity as private citizens, of course, do not come within the discipline of the organisation to this extent, and in this respect are able to act as they wish.

Nevertheless, despite this abstention from the realm of party politics, the N.C.R.M. will act vigorously whenever the occasion demands it to defend rural interests before ALL political parties.

* * *

The enthusiasm for the objectives and methods of the Movement has not been confined to one region or to one State. It may be said that, without exception, every State in the Commonwealth is showing in some tangible way that it is intensely interested in the progress of the Movement and that it is ready to contribute its share to the common endeavour and to the common sacrifices which will have to be made if the objectives of the Movement are to be realised.

Already there has been a gratifying realisation of all that the Movement demands. In the early days of the Movement its demands will be greater than its returns. It is not financial demands which we have in mind. It is the demand which will be made on the enthusiasm, perseverance and hard work of every member of the N.C.R.M. if the Movement is to be what it promises.

The Movement will do nothing to restore the rural life of this Commonwealth on Christian lines unless the Movement is strong. Our aim is primarily a Catholic and apostolic aim—to do what we can in every sphere of life to enable the men on the land to live a full Catholic life, and

to remove as far as lies in our power all those hindrances which are making this increasingly impossible.

This may necessitate action in the spiritual sphere—rather, it WILL necessitate action in this sphere, as, unless we can first sanctify ourselves, unless we can make our homes new Nazareths, we cannot bring to the rural community the salvation of which it stands in such urgent need. It may necessitate action in the economic sphere, action which will restore to the farmer control over his own destiny. It will involve action to make the country a better place to live in from the point of view of satisfying legitimate human needs. It will involve action to make the educational system more in accord with the needs of the land. Whatever action it involves, however, will be best served if we have a powerful movement at our disposal. Without such a movement, the drive, the enthusiasm, and the co-ordination which are required by our apostolate will not be provided permanently.

Some there are who look for immediate returns from the Movement. The N.C.R.M. promises nothing in this sense. The first period of the life of the Movement will be taken up with building its own strength. The N.C.R.M. is like a man. You cannot impose on an infant the burden which a man is expected to carry. If, however, while the future man is still an infant, all the care and devotion to which he is entitled is lavished upon him, so that he grows strong and self-reliant, the man will be able to bear the burdens which will be imposed upon him, and will be able to do much for those to whom he owes his strength.

The present watchword of the N.C.R.M. is summed up in two things: the first is a determined effort to found Rural Groups in every country district throughout Australia. The second is that once these groups have undergone their preliminary training, and have been granted official affiliation by the Movement, they should begin a move to include all Catholics in the district in the N.C.R.M. Unless this twofold policy is pursued with perseverance and determination, our Movement will not answer to the needs of the present situation. Those two things sum up the instructions which have been issued to Regional Secretaries.

Our Movement, however, has one prime necessity—the spiritual formation of its leaders, of all members of Rural Groups. We are not an economic organisation. We are not a social organisation. We are not a cultural organisation. We are primarily a great religious Movement aiming at the spiritual restoration of the country by dealing with all those temporal and material things which are driving men and women away from the Catholic life. Unless our leaders appreciate the real nature of their mission, unless in their groups they are filled with that spiritual fire which is the necessary mark of the true apostle, unless they are formed in the likeness of Christ, they will do nothing. We have not come together simply to make still another of these secularist and “humanitarian” attempts to improve the social and economic conditions of the farmers. We have come together in pursuit of a religious ideal, the achievement of which cannot fail to bring great material benefits in its train. Unless we are filled with the spirit

of the early Benedictines, unless we are prepared to follow their life of spiritual abnegation and self-sacrifice, unless we are prepared, each one of us personally, to do his or her share to build new Nazareths in the rural homes, we will do nothing.

We do not want to build credit unions unless they have behind them that charity which is the blood-stream of the Christian life.

That is our apostolate, that our ambition. The guarantee of the future of our Movement will not be the great things which we promise to do in the future, but the small things which we do now, the Catholic zeal with which our efforts are inspired. In these days of great national crisis, the N.C.R.M., by being true to the principles of Catholic Action, can fulfil a great national and religious function.

CAN YOU PLAY A PART IN BRINGING OUR COUNTRYSIDE TO CHRIST? IF SO—

(1) Write to the General Secretary of the N.C.R.M. (379 Collins Street, Melbourne) for details of how to start and run a group.

(2) Join the N.C.R.M.. Single Membership 5/- a year, or Family Membership 10/- Single membership entitles member to a free copy of "Rural Life" or "Fire on the Earth," monthly. Family membership entitles the member to a free copy of both.

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N.C.R.M.,

379 COLLINS STREET,

MELBOURNE.

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